

How to Sew a Packer Pocket into Your Pants (with pictures)

If you or someone you know would like to pack safely (no pins) and securely (no falling out), the following is one way of modifying a pair of underpants for that purpose. You may find you want to alter some aspect of it to better suit your needs—please do! You're the one wearing them and your comfort is the entire point. Ready? Let's get started.

Note: This tutorial assumes you will already be familiar with the basics of a sewing machine (how to thread it, wind the bobbin, etc.) and will not be explaining that process. However, you need only to know how to sew in a straight line and backstitch.

First, assemble supplies. For the first time, it might be better to work with an inexpensive pair (no attachment to it) while getting the hang of it. You will need:

- Pair of underpants
- Fabric (at least 1/8 of a yard)
- Sewing machine
- Thread
- Pins
- Scissors
- Measuring tape
- Iron and ironing board

Cotton underpants or a blend with cotton will be easiest to work with. Pictured below is a cotton blend pair in size medium. For fabric, there are pros and cons to different types. 100% cotton will be the easiest to work with, but some cottons can be stiff and rougher on skin, so finding one that's softer is key. Below is a polyester blend. This fabric is a little harder to work with since it tries to slide around just a little more, but it's not so rough on the skin. A blend with spandex will be stretchier and a little harder to work with. If it's impossible to match thread color to the pants, select something a little darker than the intended color, as this will hide the stitching better.



Before beginning, it's a good idea to pre-wash the fabric. This can be done in a clean sink. Use hot water and a little detergent, fill the sink and knead and squeeze the fabric. This will get out excess dye—it's no fun to have dye from the pocket staining the pants pattern after the first trip through the laundry! Black, red, and purple often have the most excess dyes, but any fabric can bleed. Drain the sink and soak with fresh hot water until satisfied excess dye is gone. This may need to be repeated several times, but the water should be clear or at least faintly discolored. The fabric can air-dry or go for a quick ride in the drier (some fabrics may shrink and the drier run will pre-shrink them to size) and then can be ironed.

Cut the fabric into a long rectangle approximately 19 in. x 5 ½ in. If using cotton and wanting to fold in the long sides to protect the fabric edges, make it 19 x 6. (If wanting to protect the long side fabric edges from fray, fold in a little—about ¼ inch—and iron it flat. It will be sewn together directly into the pants later.) Pictured below is a home-made paper pattern to cut around. Depending on the fabric, the measurement can be penciled on and then cut along the penciled lines. Or use a cutting mat and rotary blade.



Take one of the short ends and fold down 1/4 – 1/2 an inch, then iron in place.



Fold it over on itself again and iron it down. This will end up being the top or "open" part of the pocket and tucking the raw end in so it isn't exposed will keep it from fraying.





Pin that all together. A seam will go there later. (In the picture, this side is the black pins.)



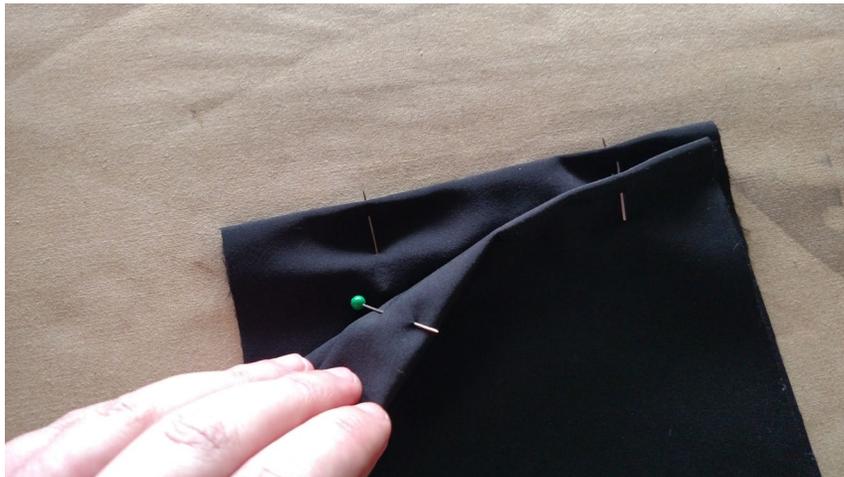
Flip the rectangle over so the pinned side is facing down (in this picture, the black pin heads are facing down, or under the fabric now).



Rotate the fabric so that the second shorter end is facing up. Repeat the above process: fold down, iron, fold down again, iron again. Pin this also. (In the picture, this side is the green pins.)



The pin heads will not be on the same "side" of the fabric. This is okay. If curious, fold the fabric in half on itself for a moment to see how it's taking shape. This is where the top or "open" part of the pocket will be in the end.



Unfold and proceed to the sewing machine.

Sew a line down the pinned portion of the fabric to hold it all together. There's no need to backstitch here as later there will be another stitch crossing over this one to hold it in place. If the fabric is difficult, position the needle above the fabric (instead of feeding the fabric directly under the presser foot), set the presser foot down on the fabric, and manually set the needle into the fabric before beginning to sew. Hold fabric taut while sewing, especially if it is stretchy or slippery. Remove pins before needle reaches them. Do not sew over pins, as doing so may lead to breaking the needle.



Once the first seam is done, flip the fabric over and sew the other seam.



This next step is optional, but won't hurt to do even if it won't be used. This adds an opening to pull the shaft of a packer through. There are pros and cons to using this. The main pro is that this helps the packer stay in the right orientation (instead of sliding around inside the pocket) and can keep the shaft facing forward in a more natural position. The main con is that this usually results in additional wear and tear to the packer, which can lead to the shaft tearing on the underside. They are usually fairly durable, but this damage may occur, particularly over time.

If adding an opening, lay the fabric down so the folded-over side of the fabric is facing downward. Measure about 3 ½ inches down the middle of the fabric. That's where the top of the hole goes. Cut a circle out there large enough to fit the size shaft intended, about an inch in diameter. If the fabric is stretchier, the size will matter less. If uncertain, test it by pulling the packer shaft through the hole. This placement may need to be adjusted for preference in future pants.



If skipping the hole step, still lay the fabric down as is described above, with the folded-over side facing downward. If cutting hole, return fabric to the folded-over side facing downward. Fold the bottom end up so that it lines up with the top.



Pin the long sides together. Pin both the left and the right sides, but leave the top open. The bottom should just be a fold.



Now it's time to get the pocket into the pants. Take the underpants and inside-out them. Lay them down so the front part is facing up (this is the place where the fabric is sewn in an overlapping pattern). This is where the pocket will go. Smooth the pants out as much as possible.



Lay the pocket down with the cut-out hole facing the underpants. Try to center the hole to the front part of the pants, as that's where the shaft of the packer will eventually end up. The top of the pocket should be about where the waistband of the pants is.



Fold about an inch of the top layer of the pocket down on itself in order to access the bottom layer for pinning. Pin this to the waistband (pictured here with yellow pins). Only pin through one layer of waistband, or there's the risk of sewing the waistband of the pants to itself.





Flip the fabric back up. Pin the pocket to the underpants, making sure only to get one layer of pants fabric in the pinning. This can be done by removing the side pins one at a time and re-pinning them through pocket and pants, or by using another set of pins and then removing the first when finished. Adjustments may need to be made as the pants fabric may try to slide around. Again, do not pin through all layers of underpants or they will be sewn together in the next step.



Time to return to the sewing machine to bring it all together. Toughest part here will be holding the fabric taut and making sure only one layer of pants is between the presser foot and plate. Sew the seam by the waistband (the yellow pins in the picture) first. Flip down the fabric over that edge so it isn't accidentally sewn as well (because this is where the packer will slide into the pocket, sewing this edge together will mean there's no way to get the packer inside). Sew either in the waistband itself, or just below. Backstitch at the beginning and end of this seam to hold it better. Again, if the fabric is difficult, start a little way into the fabric, set the presser foot down and needle in, and after moving forward a few stitches, backstitch to the edge of the fabric before proceeding forward.



Cut excess thread when finished. Fold the unsewn fabric edge back up and pin it in place.



Select one of the long sides of the pocket and sew a seam down it to attach it to the pants, being careful to sew only into one layer of pants fabric. This can be tricky and will require stopping to adjust the fabric frequently. Backstitch at the beginning here, too, as well as the end. Sew a little beyond the end of the pocket to secure the seam well. The bottom of the pocket does not need a seam as it will be more difficult to get the packer inside with one, and the other seams will hold the pocket in place well.



Trim the excess thread and the pants are complete! Inside-out them and they are ready to wear. They should be able to hold everything from a packer (reach up through one of the leg openings and between the pocket and the pants to help pull the shaft of the packer through the hole to position it) to rolled-up socks (which also work for packing in a pinch).



Happy Packing!